The Relevance of the Ecclesial Message of Newman and Kierkegaard

CORNELIO FABRO

Originally published as "Il 'Problema' della Chiesa in Newman e Kierkegaard." Newman Studien *10 (1978): 120–139.*

TRANSLATED BY JOSHUA FURNAL*

A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF MODERN THOUGHT is not the contestation of this or that dogma, of one religion or another, but rather the "overcoming" of faith and religion itself. One can see then how the reality of the church, which is the vital organism of religion and dogmas, leaps to the foreground and becomes the primary target of philosophy, which takes consciousness as its primary quality and self-consciousness as its effectual measure. It is not surprising then that—especially in the nineteenth century with the imposition of the modern principle—the church, its nature and function, becomes "problematic" for the point of reference and convergence of faith—its relation to reason and various dogmas—with the autonomous realization of the human being in the world (science) and in history (politics). It is no coincidence that in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church defended its identity and mission with the concept of faith as "authority," rather than "feeling." If its "authority" falls away, then its unity and historical continuity will collapse along with the will of its founder. Here one can see how Newman and Kierkegaard both converge in an unexpected and almost complementary way.

Just as there has been, for at least a half a century, a Kierkegaard-Renaissance, so also one can speak about a Newman-Renaissance. Although the former has been stimulated especially by Protestant theology—Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich, and Emmanuel Hirsch, for better or for worse, have been the most prominent figures—the latter is predominantly Catholic.[1] However, Newman's conversion to the

---

* Joshua Furnal is Senior Researcher and Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Philsophy, Theology, and Religious Studies at Radboud University, Netherlands. Translator's note: I would like to thank Dr. Ryan Marr, the former Director of the National Institute for Newman Studies, for generously providing me with a research fellowship and the necessary resources to complete this translation. I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Huddleston and the rest of the editorial staff of the *Newman Studies Journal* for making it more widely available.

Catholic Church, radical both intellectually and existentially, opened up the possibility for controversial yet still controvertible "hermeneutical endeavors" with Kierkegaard.

Now, it must be said that the decisive motivation for Newman's passage from Anglicanism to the Catholic Church was his search for the true church and his firm conviction about the identity between the ancient church and the Church of Rome.[2] And yet, Newman was committed to resisting Modernism and its theology of immanence with innumerable followers *ubique terrarium*, regarding the relativity of dogmatic formulations. Today, with the anthropological turn in theology, the phenomenon of the church in the fourth century threatens to repeat itself—as Newman remembered—when the majority of bishops governing the church were Arian and St. Athanasius was left almost alone to combat and defend orthodoxy. It is from the preservation and "authentic" development of dogma, guaranteed uniquely in the Catholic Church, that Newman's ecclesiology matured.[3] Newman's motto in this regard coincides with that of Kierkegaard: either/or [*aut-aut*].

> If Athanasius could agree with Arius, St. Cyril with Nestorius, St. Dominic with the Albigenses, or St. Ignatius with Luther, then the two parties coalesce, in a certain assignable time, or by certain felicitously gradual approximations, or with dexterous limitations and concessions, who mutually think light darkness and darkness light. "*Delenda est Carthago*," one or other must perish.[4]

Is there not a certain kind of pluralism that gets disseminated in post-conciliar theology, which often resembles this picture? Does not the promotion of civil well-being, standing in solidarity with society on earth, the promotion of earthly peace, and

---

1 During both the Kierkegaard and Newman Renaissance, especially in Germany, it was often suggested that this reception developed out of and was influenced by German Idealism, even though both Kierkegaard and Newman forcefully opposed it as a new form of Arianism.

2 "He joined the Catholic Church simply because he believed it, and it only, to be the Church of the Fathers; because he believed that there was a Church on earth till the end of time, and one only; and because, unless it was the Communion of Rome, and it only, there was none;—because, . . . all parties will agree that, of all existing systems, the present Communion of Rome is the nearest approximation in fact to the Church of the Fathers; . . . because, did St. Athanasius and St. Ambrose come suddenly to life . . . all will agree that these Fathers, with whatever differences of opinion, whatever protests if you will, would find themselves more at home with such men as St. Bernard or St. Ignatius of Loyola, or with the lonely priest in his lodgings, or the holy sisterhood of charity, or the unlettered crowd before the altar, than with the rulers or the members of any other religious community."' Newman, *Diff* i (London: Burns & Oates, 1888), 367–68. For more, see Newman, *Dev* (London: James Toovey, 1846), 138ff.

3 "Once the mind gradually opens up to the horizons of the Church, and comprehends its character and importance, his heart is consecrated wholly: the Church becomes the great love of his life." Newman and Giovanni Velocci, *Sermoni Liturgici* (Fossano: Esperienze, 1971), 10.

4 Newman, *Diff* i, 113.

acquiring indistinct goods, in effect subordinate theology, and its message of salvation, to that of sociology and economics? Does it not place the established church in service of the "established order?"[5] This supposed servitude fundamentally subordinates the church to the state: the state declares this confession as the religion of the state and commits to protect it and to pay the stipends of its ministers—as long as it maintains the right of appointment and governance. The Oxford Movement of 1833 arose to resist the debasement of the church, which was also prevalent in England.[6] "The Church should have absolute power over her faith, worship, and teaching," and this is to be found only in the Catholic Church (*Diff* i, 195).

This is also the case for Kierkegaard, who argued that the "State Church" represents the *larceny* and mystification that inflicted incalculable damage upon Christianity by making it dependent upon the advantages of the kingdoms of this world. With this fusion of religion and politics, Protestantism produced absurdities like the notion of "State Churches, People's Churches, or Christian countries."[7] In this way, through the mediation of the world, politics, the economy, as well as culture and science, the Christianity found in the New Testament was reduced in modern thought (thanks especially to Hegel) to the interests of this world: "You asses!"[8]

NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE AGREEMENT IN VARIOUS APPROACHES

The first impression about the problem of the church in the approach of Newman and Kierkegaard is that, for the former, the church remains central and constitutes the core and heart of determining the foundation of the truth that saves; whereas for the latter, the church—if it is not wholly rejected—is left on the periphery of the intentional circle of spirit whose center is concerned with—according to the impulse of modern thought—freedom as self-determination and the self-constitution of the "I." However, for Kierkegaard, this impulse takes on an entirely new and original form as "the single individual before God," which gets realized in the imitation of Christ, the God-Man, and in the retrieval of the faith of the early church, of martyrs and confessors, as it is for Newman.

---

[5] Both Newman and Kierkegaard use a term that shares the same root. Newman uses "Establishment," and Kierkegaard uses "Established Church" [*Bestaaende*].

[6] Newman investigates the classic text of such a view by Bishop Warburton, entitled "The Alliance of Church and State," *Diff* i, 189ff), and Newman cites many examples from that work.

[7] Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer* 1854, XI1 A 190 / *KJN* NB 30:19a. —Translator's note: In the body of the text above, I have deferred to Fabro's rendering of the original Danish text. Fabro cites from Søren Kierkegaard and Niels Thulstrup, *Papirer* (København: Gyldendal, 1968). Following Fabro's citation, I have included the corresponding system of reference in Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). Henceforth, *KJN*.

[8] *Papirer* 1854, XI1 A 248 / *KJN* NB 30:67.

The combination of Kierkegaard and Newman has been achieved for a long time now in the theological historiography. For example, consider the excellent translators and scholars of Kierkegaard and Newman such as Theodor Haecker,[9] followed by Fr. Erich Przywara.[10] Moreover, this combination already has been indicated by liberal writers like Georg Brandes, a friend of Nietzsche,[11] and Harald Høffding.[12] The trajectory initiated by Haecker was followed substantially by

---

[9] Theodor Haecker, *Opuscula: Ein Sammelband* (München: Hegner, 1949), 211. Also see, Theodor Haecker, *Der Begriff der Wahrheit bei Søren Kierkegaard* (Innsbruck: Verlag, 1932). For Haecker, Kierkegaard's merit was revealed in the structure of subjectivity, its crookedness [*Schiefheit*] in "not having conceived the correlation between objective and subjective truth." As an indispensable complement to this view, one must consider Newman, "whose concept of truth contains the comprehension of an objective truth." Josef Brechtken, *Kierkegaard-Newman: Wahrheit und Existenzmitteilung* (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1970), 5–6, cf. 145n. Haecker's position is also mentioned and discussed in Walter Ruttenbeck, *Sören Kierkegaard: Der christliche Denker und sein Werk* (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1929), 2, esp. 322–25.

[10] Erich Przywara, "Kierkegaard—Newman," *Newman Studien* 1 (1948): 77–101. Przywara only mentions in passing the conception of the church in Kierkegaard and Newman (92ff), but seems to affirm that, whereas for Newman, the visible authority of the church was decisive, Kierkegaard remained faithful to the Lutheran critique of church authority on the basis of interiority. Otto Karrer has collected all the important texts by Newman regarding the church in J. H. Newman, *Die Kirche*, 2 vols. (Köln: Einsiedeln, 1945–1946).

[11] "Through him [Kierkegaard], Danish intellectual life was pushed to that extreme point where a leap must be made, either a leap down into the dark abyss of Catholicism, or over to the headland from which freedom beckons." Georg Brandes, *Kierkegaard Und Andere Skandinavische Persönlichkeiten* (Dresden: Reißner, 1924), 431. This essay from Brandes was published originally in 1877. The Swedish theologian Waldemar Rudin immediately replicated the negative views of Brandes, but criticized him for, among other things, completely ignoring an important book like *The Sickness unto Death*. For more, see Waldemar Rudin and Sören Kierkegaard, *Sören Kierkegaards Person Och Författarskap* (Stockholm: Nilsson, 1880), 194.

[12] "The attack that Kierkegaard directs against established Christendom was conducted from a similar perspective as that of John Henry Newman some years earlier (1833–1843) who lashed out against the *Establishment* of the English Church and who later converted to the Catholic Church. . . . When Kierkegaard often claims that the great decline and degeneration is in the Protestant Church but not in the Catholic Church, he still remains in agreement with Newman whom he certainly would not have known. With this observation, it should not be said that Kierkegaard, if he had lived longer, he would have followed the same path as Newman." Harald Høffding, *Danske Filosofer* (København: Univ. Udvalget, 1909), 170ff. Høffding cites one of Newman's students as his source: Richard H. Hutton, *Cardinal Newman* (London: Methuen, 1891) who mentions that the declarations in the discourses of 1843 about the Christian ideal and the independence of the church from the state have an explicitly Catholic inspiration (114ff). Even Newman accused himself of this: "Obviously Newman was very restive under the political conditions of the Establishment, not only because he wanted to obtain a greater independence for the Church than the political alliance with the State admitted, but also because he resented the comfort, the ease, the sleek serenity, the worldly consideration and influence over worldly people, to which the alliance with the State had brought our Anglican clergy. He believed that no Church which was full of the spirit of Christ could possibly be on such good terms with the spirit of the world" (115–16). A perspective that resembles Kierkegaard's view of the Danish Church!

Catholics and Protestants alike, and it showed that Kierkegaard's radical method rested upon two pillars: 1) the separation, or rather the distinction between knowing and acting (freedom), and 2) the incompatibility between the world and the religious spirit. As Werner Becker notes, "From this perspective there no longer remains any interpretive key [*des Schlüssels*] for the reality of creation, for the principle of analogy," which is Newman's fundamental position.[13]

Since 1925, even Romano Guardini, who was so influential for other German Catholics, saw the relation between Newman and Kierkegaard (with respect to the problem of the church) in opposed and negative terms. Guardini's assumption was that Kierkegaard's conception of "interiority" contrasted with the need for the "community" [*Gemeinschaft*] of the church. However, I do not find the motivations animating these negative interpretive approaches convincing at all.

For example, consider how Erik Peterson notes that Kierkegaard's position is advanced as a "dialectician," rather than a dogmatic theologian. If dogma and church belong together, Kierkegaard (in his own view!) does not find this to be the case when he is bound by a pattern of dialectical thought without access to dogma or to the church.[14] On the other hand, Johannes Hohlenberg claims that Kierkegaard recognized dogma and thus a place for the "single individual" inside the church when he prefers the authentic Christian Church over the secularized Danish State Church (Grundtvig, Rudelbach, Mynster, Martensen) of his own day.[15]

For this reason, other interpreters have insisted on the need for a positive and constructive approach to Kierkegaard and Newman at this important juncture regarding the reality of the church for determining the truth that saves, for the appropriation of dogma, and the exercise of faith according to New Testament Christianity.[16] To me it seems that both Newman and Kierkegaard move decisively

---

13 Werner Becker, "Der Überschritt Von Kierkegaard Zu Newman in Der Lebensentscheidung Theodors Haeckers," *Newman Studien* 1 (1948): 255, 251–70. Kierkegaard's struggle against the "system" (of reason) and the ascent of the "I" toward the decision of faith or the (existential) position of "truth as subjectivity" is the aim of the thesis by Jann Holl, *Kierkegaards Konzeption des Selbst: eine Untersuchung über die Voraussetzungen und Formen seines Denkens* (Meishenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1972). It seems that the author is unaware of Josef Brechtken's work.

14 Erik Peterson, "Was ist Theologie?," in *Theologische Traktate* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1950), 16–17.

15 Johannes Hohlenberg, *Sören Kierkegaard*, German translation (Basel: Schwalbe, 1949), 401ff.

16 For an analysis of the question prior to 1961, see the dissertation by Karl Theodor Kehrbach, *Sören Kierkegaard und das Problem der Kirche* (Erlangen 1961). An English-speaking critic and translator of Kierkegaard frames the divergence between Newman and Kierkegaard on the problem of the church in this way: "Newman spent a good part of his life in seeking an answer to the right church. Had he posed the question subjectively, he would have asked instead how his subjectivity should be constituted, in order that the fellowship of those like-minded with him might constitute the true church. And, in view of the circumstance that no individual is finished, he would have been compelled to postulate that no individual is finished, he would have been compelled to postulate the true and ideal church as an invisible and spiritual order. The fixation of the religious life about a formula or an institution as

in this second direction toward a real and fundamental agreement, even if various aspects can appear to be notably different on the surface.

THE ALTERNATIVE OF SALVATION IN NEWMAN: EITHER THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OR ATHEISM

The problem of the church has accompanied Newman on his unique spiritual journey from beginning to end, which concluded with his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* in defense of the Roman Church and papal infallibility against the attacks of Lord Gladstone. The five chapters of his *Apologia* can be read as five stops on this exceptional itinerary. One should not read it as a passive acceptance of the Catholic reality and the Catholic Church as it is presented in the nineteenth century. Instead, it represents more of a call from and free response to a dynamic catholicity that is active and operative at every level of the ecclesial community: from the hierarchy all the way to the simple faithful, for the salvation of the modern person.

The beginning of this arduous and conflict-ridden journey is marked by Newman in the autumn of 1816, at fifteen years of age, and it can be seen as his first conversion after his infancy and adolescence passed by with indifference.

> When I was fifteen, (in the autumn of 1816), a great change of thought took place in me. I fell under the influences of a definite Creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured.[17]

The impetus and occasion came from his friend and teacher Walter Mayers who advised him to read a work by William Romaine about the doctrine of final perseverance: the effect was to consider oneself as a member of the predestined elect and to neglect everyone else, but this is also where he received his phrase for describing the religious relationship—"Myself and my Creator." Newman quickly refused predestination, which he thought was detestable. However, this encounter gave him the first profound quake or signal of the absolute subjectivity of conscience and God's absolute objectivity—the *radical quality* of the religious that he will carry forward with heroic faithfulness in the formulation of his drastic *either/or*, which profoundly unites his "logic" of the religious act to Kierkegaard's view of faith.

---

a final resting-place that decides once and for all the issues of life is an illegitimate objectivity which the subjective thinker uses his dialectic to avoid." David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1945), 131. For more on this interpretation, see also Walter Hammel, "Die 'natürliche Religion' bei Newman und die 'Religiosität A' bei Kierkegaard," *Newman-Studien* 2 (1954): 45ff. One of the last declarations by Kierkegaard in 1855, as we shall see, seems to be made decisively along this line.

17 Newman, *Apo*, 4.

In other words, there is solidarity or an internal relation of belonging between theism and Catholicism. Thus, either atheism or Catholicism, that one must be either an atheist and unbeliever or a Roman Catholic *is* the alternative [*aut-aut*] that Newman presented in the account of his conversion to the Roman Church in 1845. In short, what is discovered in Newman is a fundamental retrieval of Blaise Pascal's wager,[18] which represents a conclusion to the intricate and intensive activity of theological reflection in "fear and trembling" as Kierkegaard would say.

CONNECTING THEISM AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM

I think that this is a fundamental point for any serious approach to the problem of faith, especially in our time when the themes of theological pluralism and ecumenism are trending. The existential alternative manifests in two ways: 1) as the affirmation of God's existence, and 2) the real existential identity of the profession of theism along with Roman Catholic Christianity. Together, these two moments represent the result of an intense and complex interior activity brought to the theological inquiry about the problem of the church, which will be addressed in the next section. However, I mention it now because it allows us to catch a glimpse of the profound dynamism of Newman's spirit and the incomparable originality of his thought.

> *a) The alternative: God's existence and the unity of the spiritual life.* And thus again I was led on to examine more attentively what I doubt not was in my thoughts long before, viz. the concatenation of argument by which the mind ascends from its first to its final religious idea; and I came to the conclusion that there was no medium, in true philosophy, between Atheism and Catholicity, and that a perfectly consistent mind, under those circumstances in which it finds itself here below, must embrace either the one or the other. And I hold this still: I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in a God; and if I am asked why I believe in a God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I feel it impossible to believe in my own existence (and of that fact I

---

[18] The point gets developed with exceptional vigor in Pascal's *Pensées*, ed. (Paris: Nelson, 1917), 547–49, ed. Brunschvicg minor, 571f. Kierkegaard's encounter with Pascal is common knowledge by now. Beyond the vast investigation by Denzil G. M. Patrick, *Pascal and Kierkegaard*, 2 vols. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947). The first volume is dedicated to Pascal, and the second to Kierkegaard. See also, Johannes Hessen, *Religionsphilosophie*, Bd. 2 (Freiburg: Chamier, 1948), 295; Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, Bd. 1 (München: Hueber, 1940), 288; Adolf Kolping, *Fundamentaltheologie*, Bd. 1 (Münster: Regensberg, 1967), 288; Kierkegaard's three stages are compared to Pascal's three orders in Pierre Mesnard, *Le vrai visage de Kierkegaard* (Paris: Heinz, 1948), 186; Simon Geiger, *Der Institutionsbegriff in der katholischen Religionsphilosophie der Gegenwart* (Freiburg: Herder, 1926), 77 & 103ff.

> am quite sure) without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing and All-judging Being in my conscience (*Apo*, 198).
>
> *b) The connection and probing force of probability.* Moreover, I found a corroboration of the fact of the logical connexion [sic] of Theism and Catholicism in a consideration parallel to that which I had adopted on the subject of development of doctrine. The fact of the operation from first to last of that principle of development in the truths of Revelation, is an argument in favour of the identity of Roman and Primitive Christianity; but as there is a law which acts upon the subject-matter of dogmatic theology, so is there a law in the matter of religious faith (*Apo*, 199).

In the first chapter of his *Apologia*, Newman had defended the claim that certainty is the consequence (willed and imposed by God) of the overall strength of determinate reasons that, taken one by one, only amount to probability and he confesses:

> That I believed in a God on a ground of probability, that I believed in Christianity on a probability, and that I believed in Catholicism on a probability, and that these three grounds of probability, distinct from each other of course in subject matter, were still all of them one and the same in nature of proof, as being probabilities—probabilities of a special kind, a cumulative, a transcendent probability, but still probability; inasmuch as He who made us has so willed, that in mathematics indeed we should arrive at certitude by rigorous demonstration, but in religious inquiry we should arrive at certitude by accumulated probabilities;—He has willed, I say, that we should so act, and, as willing it, He co-operates with us in our acting, and thereby enables us to do that which He wills us to do, and carries us on, if our will does but co-operate with His, to a certitude which rises higher than the logical force of our conclusions (*Apo*, 199–200).
>
> *c) The Conclusion.* And thus I came to see clearly, and to have a satisfaction in seeing, that, in being led on into the Church of Rome, I was not proceeding on any secondary or isolated grounds of reason, or by controversial points in detail, but was protected and justified, even in the use of those secondary or particular arguments, by a great and broad principle. But, let it be observed, that I am stating a matter of fact, not defending it; and if any Catholic says in consequence that I have been converted in a wrong way, I cannot help that now.[19]

---

[19] Newman, *Apo*, 200, trans. This is also the lesson of the ancient church: "either to be a Catholic or an infidel" in *Diff*, 393. Another form of the argument "there is no alternative be-

Newman presents an arduous and frank account that obtains coherence from the rhythm of truth within the whole of reason, rather than from particular reasons. In itself, the argument is not entirely new, but it captures the heart of our existential situation before Christianity, which elicited both sensational and indignant results as can be seen from note II that was written during December 1880, which was added by Newman to the new edition of *Grammar of Assent*.[20] The accusation was: "Cardinal Newman has *confined* his defense of his own *creed* to the proposition that it is the *only possible* alternative to Atheism" (*GA*, 495). If the adversary—responded Newman—intends to insist on the accusation, it is a sign that he has not read Newman's published defense of his creed in the *Essay on Development of Doctrine*, *Theological Tracts*, *A Letter to Dr. Pusey*, *A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*—works that were all written in defense of the Catholic faith but never mentioned the word "atheism." Evidently, Newman reminded his Anglican readers (and opponents) that the substance of that alternative is allegedly found in the *Analogy* of Joseph Butler:

> That there is no consistent standing or logical *medium* between the acceptance of the Gospel and the denial of a Moral Governor, for the same difficulties can be brought against both beliefs, and if they are fatal as against Christianity, they are fatal against natural religion, should we not have understood what was meant? (496).

However, Butler's aim with this argument from analogy is mainly negative. Yet an argument that tries to prove something must be positive. Butler does not demonstrate that Christianity is true with his famous argument, but rather he removes the main obstacles to accepting the evidence of Christianity. But Newman insists that in his writings, far from confining himself to the argument of analogy, he used independent and positive arguments. He follows an important citation from his *Sermon on Mysteries*:

> If I must submit my reason to mysteries, it is not much matter whether it is a mystery more or a mystery less; the main difficulty is to believe at all; the main difficulty for an inquirer is firmly to hold that there is a living God, in

---

tween Catholicism and skepticism" is that "either the Catholic Religion is verily and indeed the coming in of the unseen world into this, or that there is nothing positive, nothing dogmatic, nothing real, in any of our notions as to whence we come and whither we are going. Unlearn Catholicism, and you open the way to your becoming Protestant, Unitarian, Deist, Pantheist, Skeptic, in a dreadful, but inevitable succession." *Mix*, 282, trans. For more, see *Characteristics from the Writings of John Henry Newman*, ed. W. S. Lilly (London: Kegan Paul, 1885), 338 ff.

[20] In the London edition (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), 485ff. For Newman the octogenarian, this note contains his "last words" of clarification about the fundamental thesis of *Grammar of Assent* (499).

> spite of the darkness which surrounds Him, the Creator, Witness, and Judge of men. When once the mind is broken in, as it must be, to the belief of a Power above it, when once it understands that it is not itself the *grounds and motives*; but I say that, when once it believes in God, the great obstacle to faith has been taken away, a proud, self-sufficient spirit, etc. (*GA*, 498).

This is the *existential* aspect of Newman's argument. However, this time—and it seems to me to be the first time—Newman flips Butler's argument from negative to positive, and he applies it as a law of development for dogma through which revealed truth is passed:

> And then I reflected that a law implied a law-giver, and that so orderly and majestic a growth of doctrine in the Catholic church, contrasted with the deadness and helplessness, or the vague changes and contradictions in the teaching of other religious bodies, argued a spiritual Presence in Rome, which was nowhere else, and which constituted a presumption that Rome was right; if the doctrine of the Eucharist was not from heaven, why should the doctrine of Original Sin be? If the Athanasian Creed was from heaven, why not the Creed of Pope Pius?[21]

This, he observes, is an analogical use that can be differentiated from and goes beyond the use that Butler makes of it. Therefore, when he recognized its force in the development of doctrine, he applied it to the evidence for religion and in this sense, he concluded with what he said in *Apologia*: "There is no *medium* in true philosophy—to a perfectly consistent mind —between Atheism and Catholicity" (498).

For Newman, the trouble is that the vast majority of people are not coherent in their religious convictions, and they do not worry about grounding their own beliefs; they pick up [*paghi*] what they find in their own environment. Here Newman touches upon the most original aspect of his theory with unmatched clarity and vigor: there is a certain ethical character, one and the same, a system of first principles, of feelings and tastes, a way of seeing the question and of argumentation, that is an *investigative organ* formally and normally, naturally and divinely, given to us to grasp religious truth. It must lead our minds along an infallible succession from the refusal of atheism to theism, and from theism to Christianity, and from Christianity to evangelical religion, and from this to Catholicism. And likewise, when a Catholic finds this theoretical system wanting, it is not a surprise if he abandons the Catholic church, and as a result, wants to rid himself of religion altogether. This is the dynamic of the *existential resolution* of a religious conscience. And he adds an observation about the proper context of that incriminating alternative:

---

[21] Newman, *GA*, 498, trans. An allusion to the *Credo* of Pius IV in the Council of Trent.

> I have said of course there was a descending as well as an ascending course of inquiry and of faith. However, speaking in my *Apologia* Evidences, and, following the lead of what I have said there about doctrinal development, I have mainly in view the ascending scale, not the descending. I have meant to say, "I am a Catholic, for the reason that I am not an Atheist'. This makes the misinterpretation of my words which I am exposing the more striking, for it paraphrases me into a threat and nothing else, viz. 'If you are not a Catholic, you must be an Atheist, and will go to hell'" (*GA*, 499).

Mr. Lilly comes to Newman's defense and shows that the alternative is taken in its positive sense, not its negative one, and in this way, whoever denies revealed religion must also deny natural revelation. Newman follows his own citation from a lecture that preceded the *Apologia* by many years, in which he maintains that if someone

> "let him really and truly, and not in words only, or by inherited profession, or in the conclusions of reason, but by a direct apprehension be a Monotheist," (that is, with what in the foregoing Essay I have called a "real assent" as following upon "Inference," and acting as a fresh start), "and he is already three-fourths of the way towards Catholicism" (*GA*, 500).

He reports at the end that Mr. Lilly's reply (to the accusation) is documented by the main works "of his friend and venerable Cardinal" and is condensed as follows:

> Catholicism, which he regards as the sole form of Christianity historically or philosophically tenable, is for him the only possible complement of natural religion . . . Cardinal Newman's main defence—not his sole defence—of his creed amounts, then, to this: that religion is an integral part of our nature, and that Catholicism alone adequately fulfils the expectation of a revelation which natural religion raises. This may be a good or a bad defence; but, whether good or bad, it is very different from the nude proposition "that Catholicism is the only possible alternative to atheism."[22]

The strength of the entire argument remains in the fact—Lilly observes—that for Newman, God's existence is primarily a conviction that derives from the testimony of conscience, in an irresistible way, it is the great truth whereby the whole of one's being is fulfilled.[23] This is the fundamental point under a speculative aspect.

---

[22] Newman, *GA*, 501, trans.

[23] Here Lilly cites the text from *Apologia* mentioned above (from the 1865 edition, 241, ed. M. Ward, 162: it is one of Newman's finest passages).

In this way, Newman found the true church from within the development of the life of the church. In his *Apologia*, Newman enunciates three fundamental principles:[24] 1) The first was the principle of dogma (against liberalism with atheistic tendencies) that made him say: "As well can there be filial love without the fact of a father, as devotion without the fact of a Supreme Being. What I held in 1816, I held in 1833, and I hold in 1864. Please God, I shall hold it to the end" (*Apo*, 49). 2) "Secondly, I was confident in the truth of a certain definite teaching, based upon this foundation of dogma; viz. that there was a visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are the channels of invisible grace" (*Apo*, 49). In this way, Newman admits that he was assisted by the writings of Anglican theologians like Laud, Bramhall, Stillingfleet, and Butler, the study of the church fathers, and the *Prayer Book*.[25] 3) The third point can be expressed with the phrase that Kierkegaard used to define anxiety: "an antipathic sympathy and an sympathetic antipathy"[26] for the Church of Rome where, according to the Protestant tradition, the "Pope was the Antichrist"—but Newman had learned from his friend Froude to admire the great pontiffs of the Middle Ages and he considered the Council of Trent "as the decisive turn in the history of Christian Rome." His conversion was then the continuous process of a continuous faithfulness in the continuous action of grace. The only difficulty was the church as an "institution": "My judgment was against her, when viewed as an institution, as truly as it ever had been" (*Apo*, 54). Even as a convert, this aspect made Newman's outspoken spirit suffer greatly and frequently surfaced in firm and explicit lamentations, as is often noted.

THE ALTERNATIVE OF SALVATION IN KIERKEGAARD: EITHER THE CHURCH MILITANT OR PAGANISM

Newman's approach is different from, and, for this reason, it can appear as opposed to Kierkegaard's position with respect to the church. Kierkegaard's *curriculum*, his dialectic, and his point of arrival seem to diverge from Newman's. Certainly, they

---

[24] Newman, *Apo*, 32–54, trans.

[25] This reference to the *Divines* represents one of the touchpoints on Newman's journey: in addition to Bramhall's works, "Thorndike, Barrow on the Unity of the Church, and Leslie's Dialogues on Romanism" are mentioned. Also "Hooker's great work: or Bull's *Defensio* and Harmonia, or Pearson's *Vindiciae*, or Jackson on the Creed," together with other devotional writers like Laud, Bingham, Waterland, Wall, and Palmer and bishops like Taylor, Wilson, and Horne. Cf. *Loss and Gain*, ix (London 1886), 274, 337, 365. The most complete list of Divines is found in Lecture 1 (part 1) of *Diff* (London 1888) tome 1, 2ff, cf. also p. 378 where they are mentioned as Doctors of the *VM*.

[26] Søren Kierkegaard, Reidar Thomte, and Albert Anderson, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 42.

both came from profoundly different cultural environments and ecclesial situations. The Anglican Church had not yet been corrupted by idealist philosophy, like the Danish Church, and this makes Newman's task easier than Kierkegaard's. Indeed, the great English convert had a fundamental grasp of Catholicism—also thanks to his trip to Italy when he was younger—and he had studied Catholic doctrine closely. Yet, Kierkegaard was completely entrenched in resistance to modern thought and "established Christendom," which he held responsible for the radical loss of New Testament Christianity. It must be noted that the intensity of Kierkegaard's struggle brought about an early death for him at 42 years of age when Newman was only at midlife and not yet a convert. Yet, it was precisely Kierkegaard's polemic against the state church, which was accepted and defended in Protestantism by both Anglicans and Lutherans, that would push some of the best readers of Kierkegaard during this century, but also in later decades, to enter the Church of Rome (Theodor Haecker, Erik Peterson, Alexander Dru, etc.).

However, the greatest obstacle for an encounter between Newman and Kierkegaard on the doctrine of the church seems to be precisely their basic stance toward it. In fact, Newman always involved his own *curriculum* within the church to be able to return to it through his conversion to the "ancient Mother"; whereas Kierkegaard instead *seems* to detach himself gradually from every kind of church, or the historical church as such, judging the concept itself of "church" to be an institution that is contrary to New Testament Christianity.[27] It is in this sense that Kierkegaard's celebrated theory of "the single individual before God" often gets interpreted by many readers. We can observe immediately—without diminishing the difficulty that such a theory effectively would present to constituting a traditional ecclesiology—that similarly Newman himself had discovered this feature of the Christian life, which gets evoked by the emblematic phrase of his conversion: *solus cum solo*. This also reveals the significance behind Newman's overcoming of the *via media*, which corresponds to Kierkegaard's doctrine of "the single individual" and "the extraordinary Christian."[28]

---

[27] It has been observed that "Except for the final few months, Kierkegaard went regularly to church, himself preached in churches on occasion, and as a humble suppliant received the Sacrament of the Altar." Howard A. Johnson, "Kierkegaard and the Church," *Kierkegaardiana* VIII (1971): 65, 64–79. The author is not aware of Kehrbach's thesis, nor does he mention the affinity between Kierkegaard and Newman, but he does affirm a link with St. Thomas: "Like St. Thomas Aquinas (or any other theologian until recent times), he is so living *in* the sacramental, ecclesiological reality that it rarely becomes a topic for special study. All of the 'equipment,' the whole of the 'Christian inventory,' he could safely presuppose—bell, book, and candle" (66).

[28] One can admit that in the *Papirer* of the later Kierkegaard, he considers both Protestantism and historical Catholicism as two aberrant positions from New Testament Christianity. For more see, Wilhelm Kütemeyer, *Der einzelne und die kirche: über Luther und den protestantismus* (Berlin: K. Wolff, 1934), 12ff. However, regarding our topic, Kierkegaard fundamentally criticized the two principles of *sola Scriptura* and *sola Fides* and defended the *Letter of St. James* against Luther. For more, see *Papirer* 1850, X3 A 516 / *KJN* NB 21:74.

Regarding the existential and strongly polemical aspect, which is precisely Kierkegaard's method, one must proceed with great caution and distrust categorical formulations by keeping in mind—also his precise meaning—the fundamental principle of his reflection in the ethico-religious sphere that "the truth is subjectivity."[29] This affirmation has nothing to do with the modern (and modernist) principle of gnoseological subjectivity that brought about the elimination of metaphysical transcendence and the absolute value of the historical event of Christianity. This Kierkegaardian principle simply says that to be a Christian, it is not enough to accept a creed from a church, in which one is baptized and inscribed as a member. To be saved, one needs to embody this faith in everyday life because Christianity is not a *doctrine* but a *communication* of existence. Therefore, one must detach oneself from the world and from any collusion with the aspirations of worldly privilege: career, money, pleasure, honors, etc. This is what makes concrete the *imitation* of the model, which is Jesus Christ. By accepting this principle, the church also discovers its foundation for Kierkegaard, and this explains his polemic against the situation of the state church.

The principle of subjectivity (the priority of the "I," the single individual) appears in the foreground and it is put in close relationship in a Catholic sense to affirm the priority of the church:

> That subjectivity which I think must be central above all for the Church—since one can make the same objection against every new norm that one wants to place above the Church, an objection that is rightly made about the Bible—one finds *is* already adumbrated in the fact that the most objective moment in the profession of faith begins like this: 'I believe'.[30]

But the young Kierkegaard immediately concludes from the problem of the relation between reason and faith, between Christianity and philosophy, that they can never be reconciled.[31] The most significant and surprising text comes from 1835:

> Is the Church authorized to write a Bible at a particular moment? [and Kierkegaard asks himself] Have the apostolic Church and the Bible prefigured the Christian Church and its doctrine? [And he responds] No, it is no prefiguration (a supposition that could lead to the other supposition of inspiration; just as inspiration logically brings us to this supposition); but it

---

[29] This is the thesis of Johannes Climacus in Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 1, *Kierkegaard's Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 189ff.

[30] *Papirer* 1835, I A 56 / *KJN Papir* 91. In the two following passages (I A 57 & 59 / *Papir* 89 & 90) Kierkegaard envisages the necessity of a propaedeutic science of the Apostles Creed to use within the church.

[31] *Papirer* 1835, I A 94 and 99 / *KJN* AA 13:13 and AA 13:18.

> [the apostolic Church] is nothing but the first stage of development and the Bible is our first telegraphic notification. [And returning to the first question the young theologian replies] Does the Bible constitute the Church? No, the Church constitutes the Bible, and it is demonstrated also by the fact that it has been written for Christians. [The text continues with a dig [*frecciata*] at the Protestant view that] their image of the Bible hovers over the Church as the sacred tomb of Mohammed hovers over four magnets.[32]

Here we can already see emerging Kierkegaard's critique of the Protestant principle of *Sola scriptura* and the recognition of the Catholic Tridentine thesis as the existential and theological *prius* in the sense of needing a custodian, guarantor, and interpreter of the Bible and Tradition. For this reason, in contrast with the young Newman who declared himself to be an angry anti-Catholic, the young Kierkegaard reveals an open sympathy for the Catholic Church.

For Kierkegaard, the need for the church is developed and asserted in the Christian doctrines of original sin, "the superabundance of good works," and "from the inexpressible need for prayer, which the unhappy dead seek through the living (the church's dogma of the Mass for the dead)."[33] How far are we from Luther's polemic against the Catholic Church?

Kierkegaard's stance toward the Catholic Church (separated from the state) and his resistance to the fusion and subordination of the church to the state in Protestantism becomes clearer through the years. In fact, politically Kierkegaard was a convinced conservative. When he refers the church, he contrasts it with the state and every other worldly institution that "tends toward self-preservation," whereas the church must keep itself in *becoming*. There is a very precise passage that astounds both Protestants and Catholics alike. It was written in 1849 in line with the fervor of anti-Climacus, which already sketches the first consistent critiques of Bishop Mynster and Professor Martensen. The style is dry and aphoristic:

---

[32] *Papirer* I A 108 / *KJN Papir* 74. In this context, Kierkegaard raises, in light of the theology course that Clausen and Martensen taught at the university, the objection about the "Church-Bible circle": what must be believed about the church on the basis of the Bible and what must be believed about the inspiration of the Bible on the authority of the church. For more, see *Papirer* I C 19 and II C 12ff and 14 / *KJN* Not1: 2–8 and Not4: 3. See also J. Petersen, "Sören Kierkegaards bibelsyn," *Kierkegaardiana* IX (1974), 31ff.

[33] *Papirer* II A 117 / *KJN* DD:27. —Translator's note: Fabro's rendering of this passage above differs slightly from that of Alastair Hannay, who renders the text in *KJN*: "the inexpressible need to pray *for oneself* [*til at bide for sig*], which the unhappy dead seek *to satisfy* [*søge tilfredsst*] through the living (the *ecclesiastical doctrine of requiem* for the dead [*det kirkelige Dogme om Sjælemesse for Afdøde*]" (*KJN* DD:27, emphasis mine). Fabro's rendering attempts to capture the ecclesiological resonance of Kierkegaard's remark whereas Hannay's rendering invites a more cynical or facetious view of prayer for the dead. It is worth noting Martin

> "The Church" fundamentally must represent "Becoming," whereas the "State" instead represents "the Established." For this reason, it is very dangerous when Church and State grow together and become identical. For the State, the principle is valid: "Even if one of its institutions were problematic, inasmuch as it is the established order, one must be very cautious about eliminating it, precisely because the State essentially is part of the idea of 'the Established." It becomes perhaps more useful to keep up an unsatisfactory "established order" than to reform it too hastily. For "the Church," the exact opposite is the case, since its idea consists in its coming to be. "Becoming" is more spiritual than "being established." The ministers of the Church then must not be civil servants or functionaries; probably not even married, since they must be the ones who *expedite*, those who make all the necessary arrangements to be at the service of "coming to be."[34]

The connection between church and state has brought about the degeneration of triumphalism in Christianity. Kierkegaard distinguishes between the static church of established Christendom (the "state churches," the "people's churches," the "Christian nations") and the church emerging in the New Testament, which remains central to the opposition between the *church militant* and the *church triumphant*. In fact, Christ said of himself that "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). For this reason, Kierkegaard declares that from the Christian perspective, "the truth naturally consists not in knowing the truth, but in being the truth. Despite all modern philosophy there is on this point an infinite difference" (*Practice in*

Luther's separation of purgatory from prayer for the dead: "I regard it as no sin to pray . . . 'Dear God, if this soul is in a condition accessible to mercy, be thou gracious to it.' And when this has been done once or twice, let it suffice. For vigils and *requiem* masses and yearly celebrations of *requiems* are useless." *Luther's Works, Volume 37: Word and Sacrament III*, ed. Robert Fischer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1976), 369.

[34] *Papirer* X1 A 552 / *KJN* NB 12:13. In the brief paragraph dedicated to the church in the *Postscript* (Pt. 1, sec. 2, 34ff) Kierkegaard limits himself to criticize the conception of the state church or the "people's church" as if it were superior to the Bible. However even Kierkegaard experienced for a time when he was younger a crisis of faith, searching to live according to the dominate (Hegelian) philosophy that then would appear in contrast with Christianity. It refers to a kind of "leap" [*Springet*], but not in a religious and Christian sense of the passage to faith—as discussed in the pseudonymous writings—but in terms of the abandonment of Christianity, while always preserving a respect toward Christianity: "On the contrary, it was a leap away from Christianity. As a child who had lived his religious life under the impression of Christianity and received his education from it. Søren Kierkegaard later stated that even during this time of apostasy, he had never given up his relationship to, or his reverence for Christianity." Troels-Lund, *Bakkehus og Solbjerg: Traek af et nyt Livssyns Udvikling i Norden*, Bd. III (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1922), 145. In light of this last observation, Kierkegaard energetically declared himself in favor of celibacy. For more, see *Papirer* VIII1 A 54; X3 A 419 / *KJN* NB:165 and NB 20:157.

Christianity, 205). Therefore, the truth is not a product or a result of history. In complete agreement with St. Augustine's doctrine of the two cities, taken up also by the young Newman, Kierkegaard concludes:

> If one maintains the affirmation of Christ himself, that the truth is the way, it will always be more evident that a Church triumphant in this world is an illusion: here one may speak only of a militant Church. But the Church militant relates itself, feels itself drawn, to Christ in his self-abasement; the Church triumphant takes Christ in vain. The aim of this writing here is to show with full clarity so it will be remembered that the Church triumphant always means a Church that wants to triumph in this world; because a Church triumphant in eternity always has its place insofar as it corresponds to the entrance of Christ in glory.[35]

There is then in Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity a very precise Catholic need—which is not possible to develop more in detail here—for the church: that is, for the church as it is presented in the New Testament, militantly helping, and pushing the single individual to imitate the model instead of the world. If Kierkegaard has reprimanded Catholicism for being a "state church" (which no longer exists!), then he has denounced—accusing it of "apostasy"—the Protestant "state church" as well. This polemic resumes in 1851 right after the publication of *Practice in Christianity*, in reply to some publications about Protestant ecclesiology inspired by theological liberalism. Kierkegaard's interest was sparked by reading the work of Richard Rothe on the history and constitution of the church entitled, *The Origins of the Christian Church and its Constitution* (1837).[36] Referring to this text

---

[35] Søren Kierkegaard, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong, *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 209, trans. amended. For more, see the texts from that period in *Papirer* X3 A 415–16 / *KJN* NB 20:154. With the publication of *Practice in Christianity* (1850), Kierkegaard broke away from established Christendom and opted for the "church militant" [*stridende Kirke*], which is the church of the martyrs and the witnesses to the truth. This was not a conclusion provoked by melancholy, but rather—as one scholar acutely has observed—from the profound aspiration that had shook and empowered him since childhood alongside his father: "During this powerfully moving time, upon which he reflects in the deepest and most original way, where all the past memories flood back to the surface, he often returns to the impression, given to him by his Father about the Passion narrative: 'It always lingers in my mind that they spat upon Christ' [*mig svaever det bestandigt for* øje*, at der blev spyttet paa Kristus*]. The resentment of the world that lived in him as a child, awakens within him, he feels alone in this hostile world, he sees all the holy witnesses of the truth stretching their hands toward him and he longs to suffer for the Truth as the most intimate form of communion with them and the Savior." Hans Sofus Vodskov, *Spredte Studier* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1884), 11–12. The problem of Kierkegaard's "catholic tendencies" is already recognized by Brandes and Høffding and requires further independent treatment. For more, see Cornelio Fabro, "Spunti Cattolici Nel Pensiero Religioso Di Søren Kierkegaard," *Doctor Communis* 26, no. 4 (1973): 251–80.

[36] *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 226 / *KJN* NB 23:216.

with precision, Kierkegaard observes: "Richard Rothe straightforwardly deduces the idea of the Church from human nature. It is supposedly inherent in sociality, which is a part of human nature" (*KJN* NB 21:216 [1851]). One can also observe that Rothe treats this doctrine again in his famous *Theological Ethics*, when referring to our moral obligations toward the church.[37] He says that "the *ecclesiastical* stage of the historical development of Christianity has past and now the Christian spirit has entered into its *ethical* stage as politics" (§1168, 397). Rothe argues for, using a buzzword from post-conciliar theology, the complete "secularization" of the church:

> But Christianity, according to its inner essence, wants to go beyond the Church, it wants nothing less than the entire organism of human life in general for its organism—that is, the State. It is of essential importance then that it becomes more completely *secularized* [*verweltlichen*], that it throws off the ecclesiastical form it had to adorn upon entering the world, to undress and put on what is common to all humankind [*die allgemeinmenschliche*], the ethical form of life in itself. (§1168, 397)

For Rothe, this is the point of arrival for the historical development of Christianity, which reveals the originality of the Reformation: "The decisive turning point where Christianity breaks through its ecclesiastical-historical period and moves into its political-historical stage is the Reformation. With the Reformation, Christianity itself removed [*aufgehoben*] the Church in principle" (398).[38]

Rothe's assertions are made in complete agreement with Fichte (in his work about the French Revolution) when he says, "it was the Reformation that has negated the Church itself." In fact, Rothe quotes from Fichte's *The System of Ethics*: "The Protestant communities are either highly inconsistent or they must not pretend to be Churches at all" (398). Again, Rothe quotes from Fichte:

> Hence the church is not a particular community, as has often been argued, but is merely a particular way of looking at the same single human society at large. Everyone belongs to the church to the extent that they have the correct, moral way of thinking, and everyone ought to belong to it. [39]

---

[37] Richard Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, 2nd ed. (Wittenberg: H. Roelling, 1871), Bd. 5, 397–416, §1168. Rothe returned to the problem of the church also in his posthumous *Dogmatik*, ed. D. Schenkel (Heidelberg: Mohr, 1870) P. II, 2: *Das Bewußtsein der Gnade*, 1ff. See also, *Stille Stunden* (Wittenberg: Koelling, 1872), 317ff & *passim*. All translations are my own unless otherwise cited.

[38] This observation appears also in Kierkegaard, in a different context, the previous year: "Richard Rothe (*Anfänge der christlichen Kirche*) lets the Church get absorbed into the State and thinks it perfectly logical that the theatre (As in paganism) will become the worship of God." *Papirer* 1850, X3 A 561 / *KJN* NB 21:119.

[39] J. G. Fichte, *Das System der Sittenlehre*, §30, SW IV, 348; ET: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Daniel

Recalling Schleiermacher's observation in his *Christian Ethics* that "no one has yet been able to express the contrast between Catholic and Lutheran positions in a determinate formula" (*Die christliche Sitte*, 572 and 576), Rothe says:

> Basically this contrast stems from the fact that Catholicism thinks about Christianity essentially in terms of the Church, as absolute piety as such; whereas for Protestantism, Christianity is not the Church, but rather a religiously inspired morality [*Sittlichkeit*].[40]

Fundamentally, Rothe offers a deistic, secular, and masonic conception here. Moreover, Rothe's description perpetuates this opposition and difference further by accentuating the growing carelessness that Protestantism has shown for the church as either a "*theologoumenon*" or an institution.

Kierkegaard radically contests Rothe's secularization of the church as a deduction made "too hastily." Above all, it is important to note Kierkegaard's principled position against Rothe's basic thesis when Kierkegaard declares: "I do not intend to deny the reality of the Church, or the fact that Christianity argues for it" (*NB* 23:216). Two main observations follow that indicate the positive and negative aspects (or the limit) of Kierkegaard's position, which is dominated by the emergence and primacy of the single individual. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard's two reservations come in a diametrically opposed way to Rothe's position:

> a) In fact, Christianity is related to spirit, whereas sociality refers instead to the mind-body synthesis of the human being. Aristotle rightly says that "the crowd" is an animal category. And Christianity teaches that eternal life is simply not social.
>
> b) From "spirit" one cannot deduce a society, and the Church fundamentally exists then precisely because we are not truly or purely spirit. The "community" is an accommodation, an indulgence considering how little we are—or could endure being—spirit.[41]

Breazeale, and Günter Zöller, *The System of Ethics: According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 329. However, Fichte already had mentioned the incoherence of the Protestant communities and the presence of the Catholic Church in *Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urteile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution* (1793), Werke VII, eds. H. Schulz and R. Strecker (Leipzig, 1919), 214ff.

40 "Im Wesentlichen beruht dieser Gegensatz darin, daß der Katholicismus das Christenthum wesentlich als Kirche, als Frömmigkeit lediglich als solche denkt, der Protestantismus nicht als Kirche, sondern als religiös beseelte Sittlichkeit." Rothe, *Theologische Ethik* Bd. 5, 399n1.

41 *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 226 / *KJN* NB 23:216.

For Kierkegaard, even the category of "spirit" is opposed to the Hegelian notion of *Geist*, and this indicates the single individual's absolute freedom in and for her relationship to God.

In this way, Kierkegaard does not deny the church. We have seen the defense of the "church militant" by Anti-Climacus and now he takes the opportunity from the alleged protest to contrast "the Law (and) the Gospel," according to the title of a text that takes a position against another contemporary German theologian and definitively against the Reformation. Even if the text does not speak about the church explicitly, the opposition between Protestantism and Catholicism is interesting, and it more explicitly refers to the opposition between naturalism and supernaturalism that Rothe mentioned. Kierkegaard resolutely rejects the classical thesis of Protestant historiography:

> Christianity is the Gospel—I agree, but Christ says that he did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Mt 4:17), to make the Law more rigorous, as in the Sermon on the Mount. If care is not taken in this respect, then the Gospel, grace, is taken in vain. [And now Kierkegaard's critique of Luther] Later, the Reformation comes along. It has been said that it emphasized "grace" at the expense of the Law.[42] Fine. But perhaps Luther was not attentive enough here. The norm is: For every additional degree of grace, the Law must also be made more rigorous in its interiority—otherwise all worldliness goes wild and takes "grace" in vain. And this is precisely what happened with the Reformation.[43]

Kierkegaard's position seems to veer toward Calvin when he says, "the Church exists only for the sake of our imperfections" but Petersen, the sensible theologian, does not agree: "Naturally!,"[44] as Kierkegaard ironically observes.

---

[42] Here Kierkegaard cites from August Petersen, *Die Idee Der Christlichen Kirche*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Vogel, 1842), 345n. Petersen refers to an expression by Karl Ullmann: "The Reformation is . . . the reaction of Christianity *as Gospel* against Christianity *as Law*." Karl Ullmann, *Reformatoren Vor Der Reformation: Vornehmlich in Deutschland Und Den Niederlanden*, vol. 1 (Hamburg: 1841), xiii. In the following passage entitled "Ridiculous!," Kierkegaard writes: "I'm reading Petersen's *The Idea of the Church*. It is a very well written book. But I cannot help laughing when reading such things. Here is a theologian who pontificates and blabbers on about the future of the entire Church [. . . but in reality] his life always follows the same tune [*Melodie*]: the search for privilege and honors . . . And this is how it goes today: sheer debauchery in doctrine, fantasy, observations, insight, etc.—but without any traction (or) thought, no sense of action." *Papirer* 1851 X4 A 231 / *KJN* NB 23:221.

[43] *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 230 / *KJN* NB 23:220.

[44] *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 233 / *KJN* NB 23:223. The work by Petersen is found in Kierkegaard's own library. For more see, Niels Thulstrup, *Katalog over Søren Kierkegaard Bibliotek* (Copenhagen 1927), nn. 717–19, 57.

In this evaluation, Rothe and Kierkegaard chase after one other and they evoke the shared source of Petersen: the determination of "Christian consciousness" [*christliches Bewußtsein*], one of the key concepts of neo-Protestantism, put in circulation by Schleiermacher. For Rothe, the opposition between Protestantism and Catholicism is that the latter intends "piety," [*Frömmigkeit*] or the proper relation toward God essentially as church, whereas the former unravels the ecclesiastical fabric and dissolves it into the ethical [*Sittlichkeit*] animated by religion.[45] This is the meaning and function of "Christian consciousness": to liberate the believer from adhering to "dogmas," from believing the "determinates" of defined dogmas and propositions asserted by the church.

More precisely, "Christian consciousness" expresses the historical conditions of the interaction between a particular consciousness and that of the community—but Rothe does not explain the equivalence of Schleiermacher's formula with that of his adversary Hegel. Rothe makes his point with reference to faith in Christ: "Certainly, faith in Christ must be restored vigorously, but not as faith in an ecclesiastical dogma *about* him but rather as believing *Christian consciousness.*"[46] The realization of this Christian consciousness is then distilled from consciousness itself and thus from the interaction between the believer and the world. However, any reference to the preservation and transmission of divine revelation disappears, to which belongs, according to the Catholic idea, the authority of the church.[47] For this reason, in Protestantism, the dissolution of dogmatic faith goes hand in hand with the dissolution of the church. From this perspective, the following main points can be made:

> *1. Christian consciousness is the historical consciousness of the Christian world:* This Christian consciousness is in fact nothing other than [*nota bene*] the natural determination of self-consciousness, whether an individually or commonly shared awareness, as it has been found immediately in itself either by the individual or by the community in the Christian world under the continuous influences of Christianity . . . the *natural* human feeling and the *naturally* "sound human understanding" of people who grew up on Christian soil. Essentially, it is what is presented under the name of "natural religion" (408–409).[48]

---

[45] In support of this ecclesial disengagement, Rothe cites from Petersen, *The Idea of the Church*, III: 200f and combines it with Schleiermacher's view in his *Christian Ethics*: "Luther loves to substitute 'Christendom' for the expression 'the Church"'; whereas "Catholicism knows no other form of Christianity than the Church." *Theologische Ethik*, Bd. 5, 399.

[46] Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §1168, Bd. 5, 408.

[47] On 408n2, Rothe appeals to the new synthetic method with a positivistic background, already active mid-century, that represents a convergence between science and religion in which "the many-branched, comprehensive total knowledge with religious conviction penetrates itself and melds together a systematically harmonious worldview." H. M. Chalybäus, *System der speculativen Ethik*, §239, *Der Heilsprocess* (Leipzig 1850) Bd. 2, 425.

[48] Rothe says that it is called "religiousism" [*Religiosismus*] by theologians like F. Nitzsch

In this way, liberal subjectivism dissolved faith into the religion of reason, which had expulsed it already from the beginning.

> *2. Natural religion is the organ of Christian consciousness:* This natural religion is then the consciousness of an historically *Christianized* humanity that immediately finds *in itself* the *essential* religious ideas of Christianity independently from the dogmatic tradition of the Church—the Christian consciousness as it is known naturally in the Christian world, does not come especially from outside or from an exterior authority (409).

The logical consequence of this "dissolution process" [*Auflösungsprozeß*], as Rothe candidly refers to it, leads to

> *3. The elimination of the Church:* There is now this new fact—which of course completely conforms to the nature of things—a fact that has never happened before, that the dissolving development of a certain form of the Christian Church does not bring about a new form *of the Church* (410–11).

Rothe claims that this is the case at least in Germany. Here Rothe polemically criticizes F. Nitzsch for whom the church was "the specific and exclusive organ of Christianity or rather the activity of Christ (through the Holy Spirit) in the world" (414). Rothe observes that this was valid for earlier times when the state was not Christian: "Certainly, one must admit that even today the Church is an indispensable organ of Christ's activity [*Wirksamkeit*], but it is no longer the only one and it is no more efficacious [*wirksame*] than others."[49]

This was the theological and spiritual climate of Protestantism in Kierkegaard's time, which pushed ideas like the "purely human" and identified Christianity with "a volatilized Christianity, a cultural consciousness that Christianity has emitted. Thus, it is produced by Christianity—and then it came into opposition with Christianity."[50] It takes out the water and throws away the fountain: this is Kierkegaard's critique.

Moreover, Kierkegaard's critique denounces the "dissolution process" of the church in Protestant Christianity as bad faith. Indeed, the concept of "Christian consciousness" as it is developed by Rothe in the wake of Schleiermacher and Neander, is an expression that Kierkegaard critically turns on its head:

---

and A. Petersen, in Schleiermacher's school of thought.

[49] Rothe, *op. cit.*, Bd. V, 415–16. For this reason, he observed that the concepts of "church" and "Body of Christ" are not identical (413n1). Rothe concludes his treatment of the Church with the problem of the relation between the Catholic Church and the unity of the churches (§1177ff., 471ff).

[50] *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 235 / KJN NB 23:225.

> 1. *A critique of the expression:* "The Christian Consciousness" [*Das christliche Bewußtseyn*]: The expression comes from Schleiermacher, and Neander, praising it, explains that the Reformation was a gesture of this "Christian consciousness" . . . but the matter has something very dubious about it. Namely, that Christianity ideally relates itself to the single individual.[51]
>
> 2. Protestant "Christian consciousness" is a residue, an emission of faith: On the other hand, when the price of being a Christian is sharply reduced, when all kinds of illusions are tolerated to keep up the appearance that everyone is a Christian—entire countries and States . . . then a residue of Christianity is formed (a "generic" or "common consciousness"). But if this is meant to be Christianity, no thanks!
>
> 3. "Christian consciousness" will become "consciousness of culture": In this way, the world will probably also emit a new "cultural consciousness," a residue of Christianity—also a new Christian consciousness that probably will make natural science its religion.
>
> 4. "Christian consciousness" is the sign of Christianity's disappearance: You see, the great thing is that this Christian consciousness, which in the end falls away from Christianity will become "Christian consciousness," and we will have a Christian consciousness for the whole world at the same time—and at precisely the same time—when Christianity will no longer exist at all.[52]

This is a discussion that can be described as undoubtedly prophetic for us today who witness in post-conciliar theology the spreading of theological pluralism and ecclesial ecumenism that intends to entrust to the "human sciences," immersed in contingency, the salvific message of the crucified.

Kierkegaard resists neo-Protestantism (and Protestantism in general) when they lack the criterion of Christian authenticity: the imitation of Christ and the saints. It is only in this way that the church *is* and can *be* the "communion of saints."[53]

---

[51] Schleiermacher seems to use interchangeably the expressions: "Christian consciousness" [*das christliche Bewußtsein*] and "self-consciousness" [*Selbstbewußtsein*] in *Die christliche Sitt* (Berlin 1884), 24.

[52] *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 232 / *KJN* NB 23:222.

[53] For more, see *Papirer* 1851, X4 A 246 / *KJN* NB 24:7.

CONCLUSION: THE CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE IN NEWMAN AND KIERKEGAARD

Like Dostoevsky and Solovyov in the Russian Church, so Newman and Kierkegaard in Protestantism have warned us, in a prophetic way, about the gradual and inevitable erosion of the Christian message of salvation brought on by Protestantism and modern thought. The legend of the Grand Inquisitor recited by Ivan Karamazov is at once an attack and a defense. It is an attack on the human deviations of the church and a defense of its explicitly spiritual mission. It is in this same context that the attacks by Newman against the *Establishment* and those by Kierkegaard against *established Christendom* should be read—in the context of the radical existential resolution that connects thought and life and links the contemporary church with the ancient church.[54]

As existential thinkers, Newman and Kierkegaard sought the truth by way of antithesis and they formulate it in terms of an alternative: either Catholicism or atheism (Newman), either Christianity or Paganism (Kierkegaard).[55] This alternative takes on a more universal and radical significance when Christianity in Christendom gets accommodated (updated!) to the world. In fact, Christendom "is so far from being a community of Christians that it expresses instead, as I have shown elsewhere, apostasy from Christianity."[56] I say this because "in Christendom, Christianity is situated as intellectualism"—a form of highway robbery according to Kierkegaard—and it is the equivalent of collusion with the kind of liberalism that Newman had rejected not only in Anglican Protestantism but also in the politicized ranks of Anglo-Catholicism.[57]

---

[54] In this sense, a German Oratorian once observed that "the always necessary renewal of the Church must proceed from the 'original church' of the Fathers era [*der "ursprünglichen Kirche" der Väterzeit*] . . . Newman, in a unique stroke of genius, has associated the theology of existence with the theology of objective mediation by connecting them to the Church." Werner Becker, "Newman," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Bd. 7 (1962), 935, 932–36.

[55] It is surprising that Romano Guardini sees Kierkegaard's work (and also Dostoyevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*) as "fighting against the Church" [*gegen di Kirche kämpfenden], in Christliches Bewußtsein: versuche über Pascal* (Leipzig 1934), 20. Guardini never bothered to conduct a comparative study of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, his *Journals*, or *Practice in Christianity*. What is even more surprising is the critique of Newman's "alternative" by Gottlieb Söhngen in *Kardinal Newman: sein Gottesgedanke und seine Denkergestalt* (Bonn 1946), 46ff.

[56] *Papirer* 1854, XI2 A 100 / *KJN* NB 33:26. Translator's note: Kierkegaard actually uses the Danish word for rubbish or waste [*Affaldet*] but Fabro translates it using the Italian word *apostasia*.

[57] For editorial purposes, the documentation of the original sources mentioned in this version of the article cites only what is essential. Earlier versions of this article were published in C. Fabro, "Il problema della Chiesa in Newman e Kierkegaard," in *Ecclesia Mater* 12, no. 2 (1976): 85–95; and C. Fabro, "La problème de I'Église chez Newman et Kierkegaard," *Revue Thomiste* no. 1 (1977): 30–90.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Becker, Werner. "Der überschritt von Kierkegaard zu Newman in der Lebensentscheidung Theodors Haeckers." *Newman Studien* 1 (1948), 251–70.

Brandes, Georg. *Kierkegaard und andere skandinavische Persönlichkeiten* (Dresden: Reißner, 1924).

Fabro, Cornelio. "Spunti Cattolici nel Pensiero Religioso di Søren Kierkegaard." *Doctor Communis* 26, no. 4 (1973), 251–80.

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, Daniel Breazeale, and Günter Zöller. *The System of Ethics: according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Haecker, Theodor. *Der Begriff der Wahrheit bei Soren Kierkegaard* (Innsbruck: Verlag, 1932).

———. *Opuscula: ein Sammelband* (München: Hegner, 1949).

Høffding, Harald. *Danske Filosofer* (København: Univ. Udvalget, 1909).

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*. Ed. B. H. Kirmmse and N. J. Cappelørn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Kierkegaard, Søren, Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong. *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

———. *Concluding unscientific postscript to Philosophical fragments*. Vol. 1, *Kierkegaard's writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Kierkegaard, Søren, Reidar Thomte, and Albert Anderson. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Kierkegaard, Søren and Niels Thulstrup. *Papirer* (København: Gyldendal, 1968).

Newman, John Henry. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: James Toovey, 1846).

———. *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching Considered*. Vol. 1 (London: Burns & Oates, 1888).

Newman, John Henry and Giovanni Velocci. *Sermoni liturgici* (Fossano: Esperienze, 1971).

Petersen, August. *Die Idee der christlichen Kirche*. Vol. 3 (Leipzig: Vogel, 1842).

Przywara, Erich. "Kierkegaard—Newman," *Newman Studien* 1 (1948), 77–101.

Rothe, Richard. *Theologische Ethik*, 2nd ed. (Wittenberg: H. Roelling, 1871).

Rudin, Waldemar, and Sören Kierkegaard. *Sören Kierkegaards Person och författarskap* (Stockholm: Nilsson, 1880).

Ullmann, Karl. *Reformatoren vor der Reformation: vornehmlich in Deutschland und den Niederlanden*. Vol. 1 (Hamburg, 1841).